A camp in Wisconsin.

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A Camp in Wisconsin

by F. GLEN LOYD

It's a summer vacation spot like any other, except for one thing—the youngsters who visit there can see none of the outdoor beauty

ONE-HUNDRED SUMMERS AGO a Potawatomi Indian tribe lived on the tree-rimmed shores of Big Fish Lake in Central Wisconsin. The Potawatomis moved on, but their old campsite miraculously escaped the geometric mold of modern civilization. Now the lake and its shores are part of the Wisconsin Lions Camp for the Visually Handicapped. And becoming the sons and daughters of nature in the summer (at the rate of 63 a week for an eight-week period) are half of Wisconsin's visually handicapped children.

Most of these children can't see the crystal-clear, saucer-bottomed lake or the surrounding 195 acres of white pine, hemlock, maple and white birch. However, while swimming they feel the pleasant shock of the cool, spring-fed water on their sun-warmed skin, and during hikes they smell the heavy fragrance of summer vegetation; they feel the tickle of low-hanging leaves; and hear the birds above and the playful rustle of small animals in the distant brush.

The only unpleasant sensation for most is just the taste of a few salty tears when it's time to leave. The tears dry quickly, though, because the week has seasoned the children a bit and, besides, if they haven't reached the age of 19, they can return next summer. As a matter of record, some of the children have attended the camp every year since it opened in 1956.

The establishment of the camp, which took much more effort than the squat-and-claim-it tactics of the Potawatomis, was sparked in 1953 when Poy Sippi Lion Ray Hemple talked to two blind 12-year-old boys in a hospital. A casual remark made by one of the boys was the catalytic element.

"When you're blind," the boy said, "you can't go to outdoor camps and stuff like that."

Lion Hemple, an avid camper and Boy Scout worker, began to brood over what the boy had said. One day, he came to the Poy Sippi club with the idea of starting a camp for the blind. Members of the club accepted and in 1954 rented a Boy Scout camp in the area and introduced five Wisconsin youths to outdoor life.

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Lion Hemple took on the job as camp director.

The camp was also held in 1955, but Hemple brooded again because the grounds could be rented for only a short period at the end of the summer, and there was not enough time to treat all of the deserving blind children. So at the Wisconsin State Convention in Stevens Point, Poy Sippi Lions, spearheaded by Hemple, petitioned the District Governors for assistance.

The conventioneers appointed a committee of three—who were at that time Gov. Fred Lewis and Dep. Gov. Harold Johnson of District 27-C and Gov. Charles Hoffman (now deceased) of District 27-B—to search for a permanent campsite in the year ahead and report their findings at the next convention which was to be held at Fond du Lac in May.

As the Fond du Lac convention drew near, the three became anxious for their numerous cross-country searches had been unproductive. "It looked like there wasn't a suitable camping area left," says Lion Lewis. "The lake real estate for sale was almost always too small or too close to commercial resorts.

"But then an agent tipped us off to a whole lake and surrounding land near the town of Rosholt. My God, it was almost in my back yard. (Lion Lewis lives in Stevens Point which is 17 miles west of Rosholt.) Very few people knew about the area because it was privately owned and couldn't be seen from surrounding roads. The agent said we could buy it for $18,000 but when the word got out he began to receive much higher offers. Despite the higher bids, he said the price was still $18,000 to us and that it would stand until we could get the OK at the convention which was several weeks away."

Enthusiasm for the camp project ran high during the convention and many delegates immediately pledged money for it. After a fund of more than $8,000 was built up right on the convention floor, Lewis got on the phone and closed the deal with the agent. Then the Wisconsin Lions Foundation was chartered to finance and operate the camp as a state project. Clarence L. Sturm, who was to become International President in 1959, was among the nine Lions elected as Foundation directors.

The directors met quickly and decided that the camp would accept visually handicapped boys and girls, 8 to 18 years old. Camp fees for them would be paid by individual clubs. If a blind child lived in a community with no club, he would be assigned to a club in another town. All of the Wisconsin clubs promised their assistance in transporting the children to and from the camp.

In June, only a few weeks after the convention, the Lions erected the first cabin. With a few other modest facilities completed, camp director Hemple, his assistant, Lion Frank Hanna of the Rosholt club, and several college students hired as counselors welcomed 26 blind children.

The next year Lions clubs came from all over the state, built more cabins and cleared away scrub and dead tree limbs. When summer came again, more children were able to attend the camp. *(continued on following page)*

Clockwise from left: Visiting Lions and guests at Wisconsin Lions Camp for the Visually Handicapped enjoy talent show presented by young campers. The same sloping lawn is shown in the next picture which was taken from camp's lake. Under picture of entrance to camp, Past District 27-C Governors Fred Lewis (left) and Harold Johnson (right) watch twisters at weekly camp party.

During the following years, the Foundation directors called in state and federal conservationists who guided the Lions in planting over 65,000 trees to fill gaps in the forest. To insure the privacy of the children, the Foundation went to the state legislature and secured a resolution which turned the area into a wild life preserve and forbade the use of the lake by the public. And individual Lions and clubs continued to give time, money and effort to the project.

Now the camp has 12 cabins; an all-purpose building with fireplace, organ, piano, braille library and story albums; a dining hall and kitchen; a health lodge; a custodian's house and garage; several piers, three outboard-powered pontoon boats, five row boats and two canoes; and fire control equipment, a truck, tractors and mowers. It is appraised at $380,000 and takes $16,000 to $17,000 a year to maintain.

After two years as director of the Rosholt camp and another two as director of the state project, Lion Hemple finally had to go home and tend his long-neglected shop. Frank Hanna, his assistant, has since become camp director.

Lion Hanna is well qualified for the job. A past President of his club, he is a history teacher, guidance counselor and coach at Rosholt High School. Although he works a 16-hour day to keep the camp running smoothly. Hanna always has time for the youngsters. The blind enjoy listening to his gentle voice and touching his soft sweatshirt. The sighted find it hard to take their eyes from his good-natured, sunburned face.

Top: As in camps for the fully sighted, craft sessions are an important facet of the Wisconsin Lions Camp. Here the visually handicapped learn to build, sand and paint bird houses. Below: On a rainy morning the campers read to one another from books that are written in Braille.

"Down—one, two." Daily exercise by the numbers keep the campers in good shape for swimming, boating and hiking. Below, on the shelves of the crafts cabin, are items made and treasured by the children.

The camp staff includes a custodian, nurse, dietitian, four boy counselors and four girl counselors.

Hanna and the counselors, all college students majoring in subjects directly related to social work, guide the children in a schedule which differs very little from those in camps for normal youngsters. Activities include boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, crafts, Indian lore, singing, overnighters, picnics and dancing.

The counselors are assigned to individual cabin units and keep a close eye on their charges from the morning flag-raising ceremony to bedtime. With this close contact, of course, the counselors have learned much about the blind. During his first week at camp, a male counselor thought he had made a big mistake when he led his group back to their cabin one evening and said, "Wait here until I go in and find the light for you." The children started to laugh. Then one little boy pleasantly sassed, "No, you wait outside and we'll turn on the light for you."

Two years ago the Wisconsin Lions invited blind and partially sighted adults to spend a week at camp immediately after the children's session was over. The week was a success and now is an annual event.

Last summer 37 adults ranging in age from 21 to 88 years attended the camp. When most weren't tapping with canes in sand, grass and pine needles, they were bowling, boating, fishing, listening to talking books or riding on the rear seat of a bicycle-built-for-two, manned in front by a husky counselor.

Old Gus, 88, dozed on and off under the sun and left the more strenuous activities to the youngsters such as Pearl, 80, who liked to bowl. All 37 helped each other and enjoyed the camp as a group rather than as individuals. This spirit held true even in the middle of the lake where the sighted kept worms on the hooks of the less sighted.

"I used to think of the Lions only in terms of discarded eyeglass collections," say Helen Hill, a 1965 adult camper from Weston, Wisconsin. "And I wasn't sure if the camp would offer me anything. But the camp has been a tremendous experience for which I am most grateful."

The children express their gratitude for being at the camp by presenting talent night on Thursday for visiting Lions and guests who watch the show from the sloping lawn overlooking the lake.

For the large crowd present for talent night during the final week of camp last summer, they ran the gamut from rock'n'roll singing to a clarinet solo of "Song of India."

As the Lions stood in small groups after the show, they saw the silhouetted trees and the lake vanish into total darkness when the moon went behind a cloud.

But they sensed the presence of the surrounding beauty and could share for a moment the profound enjoyment of the outdoors experienced by the sightless among them.—**F. Glen Loyd**

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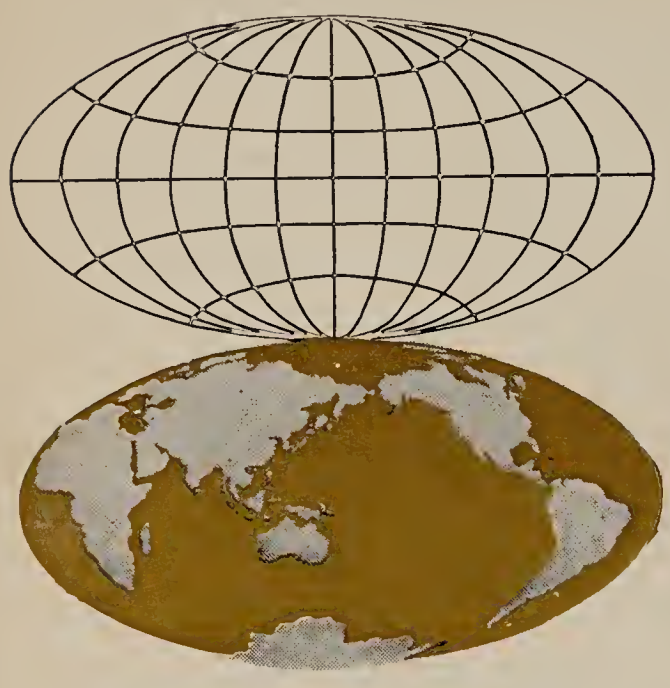

AROUND
THE WORLD WITH
LIONISM

Lionizing Two Heroes

Too often, the policemen and firemen in a community are taken for granted by the public, and their bravery is labeled as "just doing their duty." The Lions clubs of San Francisco, California decided to counter public apathy by holding an Awards to Heroes dinner, to honor San Francisco's police and fire departments. For the second year, the planning was done by a member of the Marina Lions, Fred Newman. Lion Tom Posey of the South O'Market club was toastmaster, and the members of all the fourteen clubs in San Francisco were present to see the city's mayor, John Shelley, award two plaques.

The first plaque went to fireman Robert Bruno, for his bravery during a three-alarm fire in September, 1964. During the fire, he aided his captain just before the man was killed by a blast of flame and gases. The second plaque honored policeman Thomas Smith, who single-handedly captured three armed bandits who had robbed a gas station. *(Picture at right.)*

Freedoms Foundation

Last November, thirty-five eminent Americans, drawn from state supreme courts and national organizations, met for five days at historic Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The purpose of the meeting was to select recipients in the 1965 National and School Awards program of the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge.

The panel evaluated thousands of nominations for awards in twenty-three categories, including essays, editorials, public addresses, sermons, motion pictures, newspaper editorials, radio and television programs, and school projects.

Through its annual National and School Awards program, the Foundation accumulates nominations of outstanding patriotic expressions, projects and programs from throughout the nation. The Foundation gives recognition to Americans—famous and obscure, youths and adults, individuals, organizations and schools—for their outstanding contributions to tl American way of life.

The task of evaluating the massiv volume of materials submitted w given to ten state supreme court ju ists and twenty-five national office of patriotic, veterans and service o ganizations. Among the last grou was Lions International Directo Thomas Gwynn, Jr.

Cash, honor medals and certificat were to go to the jury's selection The basic criterion for the awar was that the subject had made a co tribution toward a better understan ing and appreciation of the America way of life. The annual awards a nouncements and presentations a made on February 22 of each yea to honor the birthday of Geor Washington. Last year, more tha 1,200 awards were presented by tl Foundation. Lions International w a medal winner in 1963 for its You Exchange Program.

Freedoms Foundation at Vall Forge was founded in 1949. It is nonprofit, nonpolitical, and nonsecta ian organization which honors inc viduals, institutions and schools f their work in preserving the ideals the American heritage of freedom.

(See picture at right

Seeing Eye to Eye

The Kirklyn-Llanerch Lions of U per Darby, Pennsylvania were seein eye to eye with some little ladies wh helped the club with their last pro ect. The helpers were the Girl Scou of the North Maona District and th project was the collection of ey glasses for "New Eyes for the Needy of Short Hills, New Jersey. In add tion to the glasses drive, the gir helped the Lions distribute 1,200 ey pledge cards for the Delaware Valle Eye Bank. *(See picture at right.)*

Vandals Smash Lions Work

A cottage on Mount Warrigal, i Shellharbour, New South Wales, Aus tralia was raided by vandals and a of the windows in the buildin smashed. The Shellharbour Lions

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